

Great Stories from AmeriCorps Members

2008-2009

1) Lisa Butler, Literacy Support Corps member

Our Family Resource Center volunteers have been working toward this success since last October. We are happy to say that the Stevensville School District is now recycling all of its paper products! With the help of and support from our superintendent, we purchased our own recycle roll off unit and 100 small recycle bins for every classroom, office and work area in all buildings, k-12. These purchases were financed by grant money (Stevensville Community Foundation) as well as donations from the different clubs and organizations in our school. We have implemented systems in each building that utilize student service clubs (as well as special needs students) to be responsible for emptying the bins on a weekly basis.

This project took a considerable amount of time to research and to organize and we officially started this month. The success is not in the time and energy spent, but in the fact that now over 1,000 students, teachers and staff members are recycling paper, educating one another about conservation and recycling and taking on new responsibilities for their classrooms, school and community.

2) Lauren Cromwell, Literacy Support Corps member

Our center staff joined with a number of other service agencies in Missoula for an annual event serving homeless and high needs families. The "Project Homeless Connect" event took place at a facility downtown and offered a number of free services including resource referrals and information about early childhood. I was lucky to be a part of this event. I was able to have detailed conversations with the people that came to our room and tell them about the services we offer and let them know what we are about.

One woman came in looking for diapers, one kid in one arm and another little one in a car seat, so I approached her even though she was in here for another reason. We wound up having a wonderful conversation about our Early Head Start program. Before she left she offered that she was very grateful because she did not know anything about our program or that she had even heard of it. She was very interested and very adamant about applying, talking about her children and how they are in need of an environment such as what we offer. The day went on like this and the fact that I was able to really talk to a number of people and see either their eyes light up AND that they were interested made me very proud to be a part of this program.

3) Danielle DeWitt, Literacy Support Corps member

Although this didn't take place in the Florence Family Resource Center, our teams MLK day of service was amazing. We brought senior citizens and middle school students together for a day of conversation to celebrate their diversity and similarities. Sometimes there are such stereotypes with these two generations, that I think bringing them together in a relaxed atmosphere and encouraging spirited dialogue is brilliant! I always go away with such a wonderful feeling from the experience partly because it feels like we did a great service to the two generations, but also because I am convinced that these conversation cafés are the way to go!

It was wonderful to watch our team put something together from distances ranging from Missoula to Darby. We all did our equal share and we all came together on one day and produced an awesome event! I feel that the cohesiveness of our members and the team spirit that is so apparent with us, is a success every year. I believe we can accomplish so much when we work together and this day of service proves it. I'm very proud to be a part of this group of remarkable women.

4) Janet Johnson, Literacy Support Corps member

There are two high school proms on the horizon at our school site, so our principal thought it would be a good idea to have some dance instruction given so that students would learn actual dance steps, and hopefully decrease the incidents of inappropriate dancing at school dances. I saw an article in the local paper about a group called the Big Sky International Dancers who were offering free dance lessons. I called the instructor of the groups and she was thrilled to volunteer to teach dance at the school. She brought eight of her dancers with her and they taught a number of different dances. Parents were invited to participate in the activity along with the students. The vice principal told me this was the best attended event of its kind held at the high school and I was asked to arrange for another dance night next month!

5) Kimberly Apryle, Literacy Support Corps member

This month we had a mid-year volunteer orientation, and a book give away. It was great to get together with the volunteer to review key concepts of our program for homeless students and their families. I feel these trainings/get-togethers are important to maintain relationship with the volunteers, for the volunteers to connect with one another and to hear feedback about what works and what is difficult for the volunteers. For instance, one of the volunteers felt as though they were an outsider to the school for awhile until the teachers started to recognize them and their efforts. Hearing this made me think a volunteer training on school culture would be appropriate.

6) Flannery Coats, Literacy Support Corps member

We received the first, un-prompted, totally self-motivated contribution to our newsletter this month. It will likely become the new logo for the Futures program serving pregnant and parenting teens. A dad, who happens to be one of our most challenging participants, came in and cooked up an awesome graffiti tag of Futures during a casual visit. It was used as the title of the newsletter for March. As all of the Futures staff ooooooed and ahhhhhhed over it, I could see the pride in his eyes. His life story hints towards a life of many failures and few successes. It was wonderful that the Young Family Resource Center gave him an opportunity to succeed and know what it's like to do something positive and be appreciated for it.

7) Amy Anderson, Literacy Support Corps member

This year our Family Resource Center started a garden club with volunteer parents. Eleven students and their parents meet once a month to do garden based activities. Every month a different parent takes a turn leading the meeting. They are responsible for gathering supplies, and putting together the lesson for the kids. This month it was Eric's turn. He is our only dad and comes to every meeting eager to help.

His presentation was about growing plants and how roots grow. He read a great book, had the kids drawing plants above ground and how they look below ground. He had bean and radish sprouts so the kids could see what the roots look like, and many other hands-on activities. It was amazing!

The kids had so much fun. The best part was watching the third grade boys, they are the hardest to get to pay attention. They were totally absorbed in what Eric was saying! All the parents felt it was the most informative meeting we had. Eric is a wonderful teacher. We later found out that he was very nervous about his presentation, which made me realize, we are not only teaching our children a love of gardening in the garden club, we are getting parents involved and challenging them to do things out of their comfort zone.

8) Heather Hudson, Literacy Support Corps member

Our Family Resource Center tot times are so much fun. Parents and children bond and really get to know each other. At the beginning of the year we had one little guy who is three that was so shy he would barely talk or look at anyone but his mother. We've really watched him come out of his shell. Now he is very active with the other children. We have about 20 minutes of play time at the beginning of our tot times, and he is so excited to join in and play. He loves to sit and listen to the books that are being read, or to join in and help others during a craft project.

This month he has a real treat for us. He brought in his own book, not for his mom to read, but for him to read to the group! He had mastered memorization of the book and shared it with everyone, even turning the pages at the appropriate time. He has not inspired the rest of the children in the group to try to "read" a book to the group!

9) Isaac Sandlin – Youth Crew Leader, Northern Rockies Region

"It's hard to believe that only six weeks have passed since starting my AmeriCorps experience with the Montana Conservation Corps. In this short time, I've come to realize the potential for personal growth and community development that the AmeriCorps program fosters cannot be underestimated. I've learned that positive contributions to society start at home, and that leadership starts with the singular, individual realization that we all hold the power to positively impact our communities, our nation and the world. Additionally, AmeriCorps' impact on my own personal and professional development cannot be understated. I came to AmeriCorps expecting to gain valuable experience in natural resource management, but it is so much more than that. If my experience is common throughout the program, AmeriCorps has the power to instill the next generation of America's leaders with the confidence and perspective to affect positive change for years to come."

10) Cory Frenkel – MCC Field Crew Leader, Eastern Wildlands Region

The wind whips by at a blistering two degrees. We watch stoically as the moisture in the air freezes into a twinkling reminder of the morning's weather report and one word runs through my mind, fortitude. Although no one speaks, for the first time in the short months since we first arrived in Billings, Montana, everyone's face reads of the will to overcome, the strength to achieve, and the unbending drive to make an impact. We all came here for different reasons, some similar, but each our own. Now, as the cold air mixes with the excitement and apprehension of our first hitch, the reasons seem to matter less than the common goal and an unspoken thread of purpose seems to have tied us all together in this frigid place. No one falters, we just take a collective deep breath and march out fearlessly towards the task at hand. Whether any of us knew we had it in us, it shone through the snow and multiple layers of clothes as bright as day, fortitude.

It can be said that the true measure of a man lies not in what happens to him, but in how he acts when it does. Of all the lessons I have thus far learned in my time with the Montana Conservation Corps, this one is the most poignant. While a lot has happened, been thrown upon us, and been given to us to accomplish, what has struck me most about the people I've worked with is not what they have done but the grace under fire and determination with which they do it. Fortitude is the strength of mind that enables a person to encounter adversity with courage and if you asked me what it was that pulled us from every corner of the country to work tirelessly in the face of an unforgiving wilderness, it is quite simply this, fortitude.

11) Zoe Zalukis – MCC Field crew member, Northern Rockies Region

This story was previously shared with the Office of Community Service. Zoe is continuing in service as an AmeriCorps VISTA serving with the Montana Justice Foundation.

A man comes to the door. It bursts open. "Oh that darn screen!!! Hello, come in come in come in." He wears a worn and mismatched sweat suit, his skin is falling from his bones, his smile is bursting across his face, and his right hand is outstretched. "Hi I'm Chris! This is my son. Well thanks for comin! Glad you could fit me in."

And so I learn that this little inhospitable corner of the world, is home to the most loving person I will ever meet. Hanging from the ceiling in little drawstring bags are his treasures. Quartz crystals, small pearls, knickknacks which he finds beautiful and enjoys. The corners of his living room hold his guitars, relics of his past, and on his coffee table are countless bottles of poisonous medication, which will determine whether he will have a future.

We quietly assess the home while he asks us about our lives; about what we love to do; about who we love. He shows us pictures of family, and sings some of his favorite tunes. He becomes faint from the excitement but even after sitting talks himself silly. Four cracked windows, no smoke detector, no CO detector, no carpeting, only two rooms (the kitchen and the living room) which are finished, broken pipes, freezing cold floor, and a lot of dishes which are for naught because of his constant nausea. He brushes aside cancer as though it isn't an elephant in the room. As though it hasn't taken up enormous space in his life, as though it hasn't left him abandoned and broke in this naked place. And you only realize the tragic truth when you look into the eyes of his son who helps change lightbulbs and laughs at his dad's jokes, but who steps outside for a cigarette, hanging his head, knowing that his father will probably not be around long enough to feel the cold that will seep into the windows of this broken down home.

We chatter happily as our work progresses and suddenly the windows and doors are sealed, the lightbulbs are shining, the detectors are beeping, and our job is done. It seems brighter, perhaps warmer. "Open your hand!" He grins at me. I open it. "Close your eyes!" I close them. I feel a cold hand on mine. And then I feel a small smooth pebble. I know what it is. But I am afraid to open my eyes. Afraid that I might cry. Afraid that I am angry for him. Angry that I can give him plastic windows but that I cannot save him. Angry that in this dreary home he will see the last of his days, and that he is giving away one of the few beautiful things that he owns, away to me.

I open my eyes anyway. There is not a bone of anger in him. He admits to no frustration in the face of this great injustice. None of that. He is simply smiling with the anticipation of a 2-year-old. I thank him profusely, tell him that his treasure is beautiful, because it is the most beautiful gift anyone has ever given me, and I turn to leave.

"Wait!" He says. He takes Eli into one arm, and cradles me in the nook of the other, and pulls us toward him. We wrap our arms around his tall skeleton. When I look back up he looks sad but smiles. "Thank you. It was nice meeting you!" The screen door creaks and slams behind us and the unmistakable smell of sewage again composes itself. But I no longer feel abandoned here. I am accompanied, instead, by grief and anger, and in my pocket, a small pearl- a reminder that even if plastic cannot keep out the cold, maybe compassion and humanity still can.

And. I. cry.

12) Written by Lindsay Stocker, Campus Corps member at MSU-Billings:

My supervisor at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Yellowstone County received a call from an elderly woman who wanted to enroll her great-granddaughter in our mentoring programs. The great-grandmother came in for an interview. After the interview, the BBBS Enrollment Specialist called me and told me a bit about "Rachel."

Rachel's mother has a long history of substance abuse, and has been in and out of jail and treatment centers for years. Rachel's dad has been incarcerated for the last few years as well. One night, when Rachel was sleeping, the police came and took her mother away. Rachel told the authorities where her great-grandmother lived so she didn't have to go into foster care. She has been with her great-grandmother ever since.

In addition to serving as guardian of a 13 year-old granddaughter, Great-Grandma was also caretaking for one of her own adult children who was diagnosed with cancer and ended up passing away a few months later. Although Great-Grandma has been through many hardships, she is a great role model to the young ladies she is raising in her home.

I know all of this because Rachel is my "Little," and she is a little fireball! She is a sweet six year-old who is full of energy and loves to play. The match through BBBS has been incredibly rewarding. We have been roller skating, we have watched many movies, gone shopping, gotten our nails done, drank many cups of hot cocoa, played at the park, and have truly enjoyed each other's friendship. We will continue our Big-Little relationship, even after my term of service with Campus Corps. Rachel has really helped me realize what a difference a few hours a week can make in the life of someone younger. I have learned that we all have experiences to share and can gain the friendship of someone special, if we're willing to step out and try.

13) Written by Rohanna Erin, Campus Corps member at UM-Missoula:

Eager red-shirted volunteers lined the halls of the First United Methodist Church in Missoula on a January morning. This was the third year that several community partners have come together to organize Missoula's Project Homeless Connect. For the five hours that the program ran, the church basement morphed into a one-stop shopping trip for people in need of social services. The stations set up provided people not only with general information about a particular cause or social service, but with solutions to whatever their present situation might be; they could walk away with a bag of canned food, clothing items, hygienic products, free bus passes, a pair of glasses, diapers, etc.

Poverello Center Representative, Kevin Johnson, stood at ease in the narrow hallway where he greeted visitors, sometimes by name, but always with a smile. Kevin paired up volunteers with clients who came seeking anything from information about affordable housing options, to HIV testing, to haircuts. Campus Corps Team Members from UM came in shifts throughout the day, as did several representatives from both the Office for Civic Engagement and the Montana Campus Compact Network Office. Campus Corps Team Member, Alaina Strehlow enjoyed her experience as a volunteer, "It was great even to see what kind of services are out there."

UM's Campus Corps Team Members gathered later that evening to reflect on their experiences for the day. John Parente, a Campus Corps member who participated for his second year in Project Homeless Connect found the event extremely exciting: "Missoulians from all walks of life came out to show their support, and to do what they can for the homeless population."

14) Written by Mason Giem, Campus Corps member at UM-Missoula:

The people I met in L.A.'s homeless shelters exuded a positive energy that was infectious. I walked out of those shelters feeling like everything is going to be O.K. I really did see the city of angels.

There were nine students that participated in an Honors College service-learning class that added to our understanding of poverty and homelessness while we did service work in L.A. Over our week long stay in the 80 degree weather, we participated in a variety of organizations ranging from Habitat for Humanity to The Salvation Army. While we were at Habitat for Humanity, we helped paint a sign that some younger children had already painted because Habitat has found that artwork done by kids does not get tagged with graffiti. When we were at The Salvation Army homeless shelters, we conducted interviews with the residents and wrote them up into personal stories that will be used for marketing tools. When we were at The Salvation Army Bell Shelter, we helped with cooking, maintenance and cleaning.

The Bell Shelter had a mission statement that I felt really epitomized the attitude of homeless shelters in L.A. towards the homeless: "a hand up not a hand out." This mission statement was really utilized at a shelter we visited called P.A.T.H. (People Assisting the Homeless). At P.A.T.H. they offered hair care, medical care, job training, job search help, housing, food, computer skills training, life skills training and psychological services. The experience as a whole was supplemented through excellent reflection and personal interaction with the homeless themselves and I highly recommend it to anyone.

This semester, three trips are available through the University of Montana that offer a great way to see different parts of the country while performing meaningful service. A one-credit seminar option related to the trips is also available. During a trip to Moab, Utah, students will help with plateau restoration. Students can also choose to travel to Portland, Oregon, to work with hunger and homelessness issues or head to Lame Deer, Montana, on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation to work with American Indian youth.

15) Written by Janel Evans, Campus Corps member at Montana Tech:

Clark Fork Watershed Education Program (CFWEP) is one of the Montana Tech team's Campus Corps sites. Two Campus Corps members, Coulter Wyant and Adam Wuest, are placed with CFWEP as their main responsibility within their team. The mission statement of CFWEP is "fostering environmental stewardship and science-based decision-making through place-based learning."

CFWEP and East Middle School have formed a partnership in the last four months. Scientists, Campus Corps members and VISTA member Lorna McIntyre, tackle 7th grade science fair projects for the Montana Regional Science Fair by engaging students in the restoration of the Clark Fork River. The after school group has met every Wednesday for the past five months. Each student has a mentor to assist with his/her project. The mentors are all from Montana Tech, where they are either professors or graduate students.

A few of the projects competing in the science fair are: The Influence of Heavy Metals on Aquatic Snails, Groundwater Quality in Local Wells and Plant Germination with Exposure to Soda, Mine Waste or River Water. The students, mentors, CFWEP, Campus Corps and VISTA make a remarkable team! Each individual involved puts in a lot of hard work and time that is paid off when the spectacular science fair projects are complete!

March 9th was "set up and get ready!" day at MT Tech for the roughly 500 students grades 5th through 8th. Montana Tech Campus Corps members volunteered to help out with preparations, the big day itself and final cleanup all before, in between and after daily classes. In essence, these were a couple of crazy, busy days for everyone involved!

16) Written by Ruth Moore, Campus Corps member at Fort Peck Community College:

Students and staff at the Brockton school were quietly, yet eagerly, awaiting the scheduled appearance of the Hustle Up Streetball players. It was unbelievable that the famous Streetball players were coming to the Fort Peck Reservation, much less to their school! Doubt was in their minds that the visitors would be the same ones that they've watched on TV and YouTube. When the players appeared at their schools, joy and excitement was evident on the faces of all who got to see, listen to, and meet the players.

With the collaborative help of several local organizations, including the Fort Peck Wellness Center and FPCC Campus Corps team, the Hustle Up Streetball players were brought to the Fort Peck Reservation to bring positive lifestyle messages to the youth in addition to showcasing their infamous basketball skills.

Brockton's quarterly honor roll awards assembly was highlighted with four of the Streetball players presenting honor roll certificates to the students. During the presentation, a couple of the players sat with the students and posed for pictures. At the conclusion of the assembly, the players autographed honor roll certificates and sheets of paper for all the students. One young student was observed giving what appeared to be a pair of beaded earrings to one of the players as he was leaving the building to show her appreciation and respect.

Frazer, Wolf Point, and Poplar also had positive responses when the players visited their schools. Frazer and Wolf Point held assemblies and players signed autographs and had pictures taken with students. Poplar had a different format, where the players were escorted by the Junior High Student Council members. They walked throughout the middle school, visiting classrooms and surprising those that happened to be in the hallways.

The highlight of the Hustle Up Streetball players visit was their game against the Fort Peck All Stars, which was comprised of local players from throughout the reservation. Due to the generous contributions by the local sponsors, there was free admission to the game. Many of the students who came to the game would not have been able to attend if there was a charge at the door. Attendance was great, with the majority of the crowd being school age youth. The energized audience was cheering and jumping to their feet within the first minute of the game in response to some awesome dunks by the flashy Streetball players.

It was a positive and fun activity for all that evening. Thank you to all who made this event possible!

17) Heather Hudson, Literacy Support Corps member

This month a community member who is without employment called the Family Resource Center looking for volunteer opportunities to alleviate the boredom she was experiencing in her unemployment. I invited her to the school to meet with myself and two teachers I knew needed assistance in their classrooms. This volunteer has been at our school four days a week ever since. Three days a week she assists in the first grade classroom with special projects and the fourth day she volunteers in the kindergarten classroom working one-on-one with students. The students now call her "Gramma Shirley". Shirley says she now has a purpose in her life again, and it is obvious that she is enjoying what she is doing as she always has a big smile on her face!

18) Erica Dossa, Literacy Support Corps member

This month we held an event for students and their families who participate in WORD's homeless tutoring program. To celebrate the academic progress of the students everyone spent an evening at the local water park with dinner included. It was so fun to distribute invitations to the students to take to their families. Excitement was much greater than I expected. One student jumped out of his chair and ran a lap around the table. Once he settled back down he was more focused and determined to work than I'd ever seen before. Later I observed several of the homeless fourth grade students together in the hall. They are not usually the closest of friends; however they were laughing and chatting and talking excitedly about the party. These students have worked hard and it's wonderful to their excitement over the party and recognition.

19) Lauren Cromwell, Literacy Support Corps member

This month our Parent Committee organized an activity in partnership with the Missoula Children's Museum. Matthew Nord, a local children's musician entertained children and their families with song. Prudential Montana Real Estate donated board books so that each child attending received a book in conjunction with "National Library Week" and "Week of the Young Child". I had the privilege of dressing up as the Cat In the Hat character from the Dr. Seuss book and surprised families with the book give-away. Additionally we were able to hold a drawing for a free computer! The whole event was not only successful, but humbling to see how excited the children and families were in participating in the event.

20) Marcia Burgess, Literacy Support Corps member

I was making calls seeking in-kind donations for a school event, when a parent informed me that the primary wage earner in the family had been laid off and they were now living on her school loans. I politely asked if they had sought any assistance and upon hearing that they had not, I shared information with her on resources available. She came in to the Family Resource Center the next day to pick up an application for SNAP (food assistance program). I also gave her information on WIC as there are pre-school children in the home, and assisted her in signing their school-age children up for free and reduced lunch and the "Back Pack" program sponsored by the Montana Food Bank Network that sends a back pack of food home with children for the weekend.

21) Amy Anderson, Literacy Support Corps member

A Family Resource Center volunteer approached me saying she would like to start a bartering club. Having recently received some AmeriCorps training on bartering, I had some beneficial information I passed on to her. It was so exciting to see her take the information and go with it! She has used the Family Resource Center for the many meetings to get the project organized and the center has assisted with outreach to potential participants. This project is turning out to be quite a success and we are all excited to barter using our own Bitterroot hOURS (The name hOUR is meant to remind you that, besides being a medium of exchange, it also represents someone's labor, the time taken to provide a skill or perform a service. Your time is worth something to someone else. When you give someone an hOUR, you are telling them I appreciate your efforts and how much you did, please give the equivalent back.) Check it out! <http://bitterrootbarter.com/>

22) Rhonda Huguet, Literacy Support Corps member

This month we held a breakfast event called "Wonderful Woman and Me" to honor the nurturing women (primarily mothers) in the students' lives. It takes many staff members and other volunteers to put on this breakfast, which this year served over 450 Wonderful Women and students. One month ahead of time I sent a request to our PTA members, asking for

volunteers. Our PTA President responded, saying tht her in-laws would be visiting from out-of-state and to please sign her father-in-law up to help cook and serve pancakes. She stated that he is a retired Elementary School Principal, and would absolutely love to participate. On the day of the breakfast, he was there, enthusiastically flipping pancakes. After the breakfast, I went to thank him, and he and his wife thanked ME for allowing him to help. They were impressed with the event, and thrilled to be there. A few days later, I was horrified to hear that on their way home, the wife had a stroke and passed away. I expressed by condolences to our PTA president. She said that at least they had a wonderful time at the breakfast the day before the tragedy, and couldn't stop talking about it.

23) Amy Zanoni, Literacy Support Corps member

Each summer WORD facilitates a summer camp for homeless students. I spent a good deal of time tracking down one parent to secure the completed paperwork so one of the students would be signed up. This student is as good a kid as his circumstances are hard. He has more resilience and positivity, generosity, kindness and appreciation than any ten year-old I know. He also wears a real feeling of dejection and stress in every inch of his person, and so I was really persistent in getting him signed up for camp, and opportunity I expected he'd appreciate and a setting I thought he'd thrive in. And so, I got him signed up and the success lies in the smile on his face in every instant that he's at summer camp!

24) Flannery Coats, Literacy Support Corps member

We have been focusing on job searching and resumes with teen parents this month. The center has an individual computer for parents to work on. I made a template for resumes and put it on the desktop in hopes that a template might make the resume making process a little less intimidating. I walked through the door a week or so later and a drop-in parent looked at me and asked if I could help her print her resume. I was thrilled, not only that the template allowed her to do it herself without nudging from me, but also because this particular gal was someone who I had offered help in making a resume numerous time to no avail! She is now working at a local care center, getting paid training as a CNA.

25) Amanda Pfaff, MCC Crew Leader, Greater Yellowstone Region

When my crew and I arrived at the Dinosaur Playground on the Monday morning before it's intended Sunday opening, I looked around at the open space, interrupted only by a few dozen Sono-tubes, set in deep beneath the ground to assist with structural support, and I couldn't help but think to myself, how in the heck is this going to turn into a finished playground in seven days? I certainly had my doubts, but having no idea what to expect, my anticipation for the project's completion was high and I couldn't wait to see the transformation.

The bulk of the construction did not even begin until Wednesday morning when Justin and Lee arrived, the front-men on the project: most of Monday and Tuesday were spent putting up

temporary fences, assembling the giant food tent, setting beams in the Sono-tubes, and doing other preparatory work. On Wednesday however, the volunteers started pouring in and work really started getting done.

Watching the daily progressions occur on site was amazing; piece by piece, screw by screw, one set of volunteers after another, the playground slowly took form. It's remarkable for me to think about, that this huge project could not have been successful without all the volunteers who came to help, who gave up their evenings, their days, even their weekends. Every day I was able to work with new people, of all ages, of all backgrounds. I watched a pair of teenage siblings making a playful game out of hammering, seeing who could get the nail in with less swings. I watched a father and son go to grab 12' long 2X4's- the father started to pick up two boards, and the 10 year old boy said, Dad, I can carry more than that; fifteen minutes later I looked over and the pair was carrying five boards across the site, I couldn't help but smile. It felt good to look up from the task at hand and see parents bringing their children out to volunteer, to see them laughing and working with one another. Volunteer turnout really said a great deal about the local community.

My appreciation for the week I spent at the playground also had a great deal to do with the nature of the work. Having told Lee and Justin that I'd had previous experience with carpentry, they entrusted me with leading many small group projects; I was able to work with my crew and other volunteers and help them learn and get things done. Honestly it was empowering. There I was, a 23-year-old girl, and I was in charge of directing men and women of all ages, I loved it. Not only was I able to pass my own knowledge but I learned so many new things and mastered so many new tools. Justin put me in charge of putting together the small rubber suspension bridges on the playground, I was excited that he let me take lead on what I considered a pretty big project, and while I had dozens of questions on the first bridge, when it was time for the second, I was able to teach others. I think that's one of the great things about volunteer builds such as this; people with little or no experience can come in and are given the ability to do things they've never done before, to contribute in ways they probably never imagined they could, and then they walk away not only having the rewards of giving their time, but also in acquiring new skills and a new sense of confidence. At least that's how I feel.

My favorite experience at Dino Park came on Thursday afternoon; I'd just finished taking inventory of playground parts, and was asking Justin for my next assignment. He then asked me if I was at all creative. He probably couldn't see my eyes light up behind my sunglasses, but he had just asked the million-dollar question. With a giant grin on my face I proceeded to tell him that I was an art major in college. His response – "and you wait until now to tell me this?" I then followed him across the site to where he said he had the perfect project waiting for me. As we approached a giant beam that would later be lofted to hold the tire swing, he asked me if I'd ever used a router, I said no, he said, you'll learn. He then gave me a few sheets of paper, one of them listing the words that needed to be routed into the beam; he gave me a crash course in using a router and left me to have at it.

Part of me was scared to death, this was a huge deal, it wasn't like an art project in college where if I messed up I could just get a new piece of paper- this was a 20 foot beam, and any

error was permanent. The other part of me was experiencing an adrenaline rush, I was completely enticed by the challenge. Yes, it was intimidating, but I felt an unusual confidence in my ability, and I was so excited to be trusted with such a high profile project. I jumped right in, learned as I went and immediately became obsessed with the routing process. I loved this task. It took me a long time to finish, and there are definitely some errors in my work, but when I stepped back to look at what I'd done, I felt proud. The day before I'd never even touched a router, and there I stood 24 hours later having finished the sign that would be displayed for all to see in the playground, it felt awesome.

I ended up putting in over 60 hours of work at the playground that week, and I'd do it again in a heartbeat. Though it was chaotic at times, it was great to see so many people work together to meet the deadline. For me it was a week full of fun work, great people, great food, and exciting challenges. It left me feeling proud of the contributions I made, confident in my ability to lead and to learn, and glad that this had been put on my project schedule for MCC...and it also led me to tell my parents that I now want a router for my birthday. All in all, it was an awesome experience and I'm grateful that I got to be a part of it.

26) Finding My Place: from cubicle to crew: Kirsten Vorreyer Corps Member, Western Wildlands Region

Last January was a low point for me, in fact the whole spring semester I felt like I had somehow slipped into a rut that had a hold on me. I was almost a college grad just one class to go (that wasn't offered that semester) and then wham bam just like that I would no longer be a student, I would be a real person. A real person with real responsibilities like a job that starts before 10:00am in order to single handily cover the bills, a person that remembers to pay the phone bill on time and check the oil. The reality that my cushy college years were over slapped me in the face and left me feeling stunned. My dad couldn't have been more pleased at last his 24-year-old daughter was on her own. When I talked to him on the phone he would exclaim in glee "Wow Kerde you are on your own now!" I had always been so optimistic during my college years, I felt like my diploma would put a job in my lap.

You can imagine my disappointment when two months of job hunting didn't even get me an "in" at the school cafeteria. At last I did get a call to be a telemarketer and I cried, twice, first with relief and then again once the job started. Oh how I hated it. The cubicle, the repetition, the pointlessness of it all. All day I would call people who didn't want to hear from me, to try and get them to attend free talks in hopes of getting them to buy stuff they didn't need. Under the gloom of the Missoula inversion, trapped in my cubicle I could feel a restlessness stirring inside of me. I needed a change; I needed a boost of energy that could come only from an outside in transformation. I needed a fresh path to get me to hire state of inner being. In the dark of my cubical I fumbled my way around the MCC web sight and grabbed onto it like a lifeboat.

The MCC started out like a good summer camp complete with games, instruction, and most importantly a healthy energetic crowd - a real rarity around the office. I loved it. With the sun in my eyes I could feel my sprits were already lifting with anticipation. The following day we got

assigned our crew, 5 dudes and two chicks (including me). It was a trip trying to imagine this odd mix of men plus girl as my new surrogate family. During my first interactions I felt like an anthropologist, trying to get the dirt on everyone. Words like yoga instructor and mediation lead me to visualize the whole lot of us as Zen masters waking early to chant to the gods in the morning. One could only guess what it would be like.

1st Hitch

What did I get myself into!? Oh the rain - no wait snow - this is summer!? I didn't sign up for this! Transformation however necessary is rarely easy and the first hitch was no exception. The first night was so cold, Amanda and I stood under a tarp holding the big dinner pot sucking the last bits of heat out of it in a kind of survival mode desperation. It was a bit dramatic but she is from Florida and I haven't been camping in awhile. After that I ran to my tent and in a fetal like position sandwiched myself into my sleeping bag all the while chanting the mantra, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Looks like there would be chanting after all.

The next day I woke to a damp fog and started rolling barbwire fence with my crew. There we were in the clouds making tight wire wreaths all with surprisingly high spirits. It was beautiful. The sun lifted that afternoon and dried me out so completely the rain seemed like a distant dream. It felt so refreshing to be doing something that mattered. With each wreath I rolled I pictured the animals running free and I felt a relief in myself.

Being surrounded by so much beauty and so much space lets one see beyond the rat race of traffic, shopping, standing in lines. Those daily frustrating parts of city life can't touch you out in the sanctuary of the woods. Out here if you forget to pack underwear (hypothetically speaking – well not really) you just deal with it you don't have to endure the hell of Reserve Street. Frankly I think I would rather wear dirty underwear then go out there anytime soon. Life is simple out here - you have less cloths and less choices. In the evenings your options are basically reading, stretching, sitting, eating, and sleeping. Oh and of course hanging out with the crew whom I must say I am becoming increasingly fond of.

Our crew comes with a Zen master, a yoga instructor, two of the chilliest guys I have ever met, a witty upbeat leader, and a steady hard worker. I feel in good hands for the upcoming 5 week hitch. Today we bought more food than I have ever seen outside of a grocery store. It will be an adventure to remember – so I better go finish packing.

27) Written by Ashley Widtfeldt, Campus Corps leader at MTCC:

Sharing their stories of service, learning from the peers and engaging with the Bozeman community are just a few of the activities Campus Corps members were part of on April 17th-19th at this year's Spring Summit. Most Campus Corps members had not seen one another since the building Engaged Citizens Conference in September, when most were new to the program and just getting a feel for what their year would entail. With almost eight months of experience behind them, members were able to connect with one another on a different level.

Many of the individuals who attended Spring Summit were very grateful to take part in the peer

training sessions. Different workshops were offered by current Campus Corps members and members of the Montana Campus Compact July VISTA class. The workshop topics ranged in content from Building Organic Partnerships to Promoting Physical Activity in Youth, Event Planning to Community Resourcing. As with all Campus Corps trainings, members took some time out of training to serve the Bozeman community. They served at the Gallatin Valley Food Bank, Heart of the Valley Animal Shelter, and with the Vandalism Task Force.

Along with peer trainings and service, members were recognized for their achievements throughout their terms of service. Although not everyone can win an award, all of the individuals involved with Campus Corps made substantial contributions to their respective communities through service.

28) Written by Tracy Lost-Bear, Campus Corps member at Flathead Valley Comm. College:

Seussville University was a great success this year thanks to the group effort of Campus Corps members at Flathead Valley Community College and many wonderful students and staff members who volunteered their talents and time to plan, set up, and entertain during the event. This year's celebration, in the spirit of Dr. Seuss, promoted literacy, math, music, and art skills to over 250 third-grade students from around Flathead Valley.

To kick the event off, each school bus that arrived filled with excited students was greeted by the smiling faces, waving hands, and cheers of enthusiastic volunteers. It was an enriching experience for everyone who attended. Students participated in activities that encouraged group participation, creativity, and body movement— Children and adults alike had the opportunity to let go of their everyday routines, loosen up and have as much fun as possible.

Some of the volunteers dressed as their favorite characters from Dr. Seuss books. They helped guide the elementary school children through different learning stations filled with fun activities. The stations included reading, mathematics, music, and art.

In the reading area, children listened to, and were encouraged to participate in the reading of an original rendition of a Dr. Seuss book. In the math area, children worked with tangrams to create different shapes such as boats, foxes, and rabbits. In the art area, children decorated clay pots and planted pine trees in them before taking them home. In the music area, theatre members entertained the children with singing, dance, and sign language. The highlight of the day was when the theatre group put on a special play. FVCC's theatre members presented a short play about the Star-bellied Sneetches.

The play was an excellent lesson in the importance of recognizing and accepting our differences, and doing away with the ideals of discrimination, prejudice, and superiority.

A clear message was presented during the play, “. . . until neither the Plain-bellied nor the Star-

bellied Sneetches knew whether this one was that one or that one was this one or which one was what one . . . or what one was who,” so, both the audience and the Sneetches learned from this experience that everyone is capable of getting along and becoming friends.

To close the celebration, FVCC’s very own Cat-in-the-Hat, with the help of the Grinch, presented awards to children who entered an art and poetry contest. Each winner was announced and then invited on stage so the Cat-in-the-Hat could give them their special prizes. The Cat-in-the-Hat encouraged the audience to applaud each winner’s hard work and accomplishment. At one point, the Cat-in-the-Hat explained to the audience that the Grinch was really misunderstood and not such a bad guy. The audience responded with a round of applause for the Grinch.

Every student and teacher present also received an Honorary Degree from Seussville University. Students also received a special treat as the Cat-in-the-Hat signed autographs as they were leaving for the day.

29) Written by Heather Corcoran, Campus Corps member at Montana Tech:

Saturday, April 25th was my last visit to Reintegrating Youth Offenders (RYO), a federal youth detention facility in Galen, MT, where my Campus Corps team has served throughout the year. Like all Saturdays, I didn't want to go, and like all Saturdays, when all was said and done, I'm so glad I went! On this particular visit, we discussed the role of mentors. We started out our discussion by asking everyone, in their own words, to define what a mentor is and we asked the incarcerated youth who they consider to be their mentors and why. Hearing some of their stories was heart-breaking. In Pod B, I heard one of the inmates say that a member of the staff was his mentor. Hearing him describe how he felt about this person brought many of us to tears.

We also talked with the residents about how they can become better mentors when they are released from the program and reintegrated into society. These boys had never opened up to us the way they did on this day! In fact, we usually wrap-up our sessions by 11am, and it was almost noon by the time we left! After an entire year of Saturday visits to RYO, the youth were finally opening up to us as volunteers and mentors. It felt so good that they were able to trust us enough to be so open and honest.

As I met with each group, I explained this was my last visit. I became a little emotional, which surprised me. A few of them came up to me as I was leaving and thanked me for what I've done, wished me the best of luck and told me I would be an awesome teacher. I just smiled and said, “Thanks!” I had to tell them all that they had a great impact on me and I wish them all the best in life. We pounded fists and said our good-byes.

My last Saturday at RYO was a bitter-sweet day. Hearing some of their future great stories was incredibly moving and inspirational, but it was also hard to say good-bye. All I can do now is wish them all the best of luck and trust that I've made a difference in their lives.

30) Written by Liz Dellwo, Campus Corps member at Montana State University

As a Campus Corps team leader for Montana State University, I took away many great experiences. From sitting one-on-one with fellow team members, to organizing different volunteer opportunities, it was all a phenomenal experience. My favorite experience, however, was my direct service at a local Bozeman Elementary School, where I had the opportunity to tutor two young students from the start to the end of the school year. The students were both able to share with me stories from the playground, friends, and their families in between math lessons.

One of the students, E.W., came mostly in the same clothes every day, either torn or dirty, and always commented that her family didn't have a lot of money. She struggled with her homework as a result of not a lot of support at home, so she was never allowed to have recess. I decided to set up an incentive program with her (my psychology degree going to great use). I told her that for every 4 days she could get her homework turned in on time I would give her something new that she could use in school. Her eyes lit up when she heard she would be getting new pencils and erasers. I came back the next week and sure enough she had turned her homework in! Her teacher was thrilled, and E.W. got to play on the playground during recess. The quality of her homework even increased as she was looking forward to new things every week.

Shortly after we had set up the program, it was time for Christmas break. As an America Reads * America Counts program, we give each child that is tutored two books as a gift. Excitedly, I arrived to school at the end of the week with two books for each of my students. As I sat by E.W., I told her she had a present waiting for her in her mailbox that she could set under her tree. Once again, her eyes lit up as she began to ask me questions about what it might be.

The break came and went and I returned to my regular tutoring schedule once school was back in session. It was a snowy day and I rushed to the school as I was anxious to hear all about E.W.'s break and what she did. As I asked her how it went, she quickly named off the few gifts she had received. Among her favorites were the books I gave her. Quietly that light came back into her eyes as she leaned over and whispered to me, "Liz, I got the Barbie I wanted, did you give that to me too?" I was overwhelmed with her question. "No, I believe someone else is responsible for such a wonderful gift." I answered. As I sat there, I began to realize the very special relationship I had formed with her, and how much I was actually a part of her life.

As a follow-up, E.W. and her family are picking up and moving out-of-state to pursue some software programming opportunities. Although we may never cross paths again, being able to make the difference I did was extremely meaningful to my year of service.

31) Written by Rohanna Erin, Campus Corps member at the University of Montana

During our final Campus Corps leadership retreat, I really felt the effect of the relationships that we've made over our terms of service. I felt so fortunate to have such an amazing group of fellow team leaders to get to know, share struggles with, and to feel a sense of camaraderie with. It was through the team leader retreats that we had the time and space to digest and reflect on our year of service.

32) Written by Jacqueline St. Peter, Campus Corps member at the University of Montana

As part of my Campus Corps service with the Flagship Program, I taught a class called "Knit Wits." In this class I taught 4th and 5th grade boys and girls how to knit. This was a lunch time class where the students eat their lunches with me and then we knit. At the beginning of the year, I thought the class was going to be difficult because there were 18 students and only 2 instructors. The first day was very difficult; all the students wanted one-on-one attention and were very impatient. I don't know how many times I had to say "Can you practice your patience?" or "Can you find a classmate to help you with that?"

At the end of the day I had a talk with the students. I explained to them that we all need to work better together so that we can get our problems solved. It was a very rough first day but I was shocked the next day when the students had formed groups to help each other and they miraculously became patient and helpful to each other. The students weren't perfect every time but they had learned to be patient, understanding of others, and helpful. I was so excited that because of what I said the students made a conscious effort to behave and help one another.

33) Amy Zanoni, Literacy Support Corps member

In this last month of service I experienced tremendous personal growth while working with the kids at the Summer Arts and Leadership Camp. The nature of the camp – well organized but not overly structured – fostered substantial and genuine interactions, as effective in their socializing capacity as in their ability to provide great comfort and support to the homeless children who attended. The camp's impressive amount of variation, activities from swimming to hiking to mask-making to rafting to beading to basic sports to scavenger hunts to rock-climbing to clay-making, was invaluable in a multitude of ways. The diversity in activities made it so that the campers were learning new things constantly, effectively transforming summer camp into a forum for education. The multiplicity of activities provided every camper the opportunity to be in his or her element, to shine and impart his or her know-how to other campers. This bilateral and fluid learning dynamic was incredibly beneficial in terms of its power to unify camp staff and campers. Instilled in all was a sense of trust and confidence and reinforce meaningful and reliable relationships.

At times summer camp was a real test of my patience, which I really appreciate as the only way to really ensure and maintain the attribute. Working with the other staff members was very educational, as they had a lot of insights and inspirational ways of facilitating. My most successful moments at camp were the subtle ones, the ones that occurred on a day-to-day

basis. I felt like I was able to truly engage many of the campers and be present for them as a consistent and reliable adult. This experience and the number of families I've gotten to know well has grown enormously, which I feel really good about in terms of gaining the rapport that will help me to more effectively have an impact on my community.

34) Lauren Cromwell, Literacy Support Corps member

While the month of July was filled with time consuming activities and tasks, the garden we created through the center was very fulfilling. Teachers were incredibly grateful for the wonderland created for the children to play in and children were always excited to get outside and get into the interactive garden to see what the garden was producing each day. Parents and staff engaged in a number of positive conversations about the garden. Together, parents and their children decorated stepping stones and they also painted a bench as part of our art curriculum and these items were added to the garden. The garden is a source of learning, community building and enjoyment for teachers, parents and students.

35) Melissa Chambers, MCC Continental Divide Crew Member

Looking down at my finger nails, I marvel at how clean they are. This is odd because they have not been clean for the last 5 months.

Leaving the woods and coming back to car-filled streets and crowded supermarket aisles is bittersweet. I am happy to now include showers, toilet paper and pillows in my life, but I am sadden at the realization that my world is no longer made up of simply my tent and the trees around it. There are so many luxuries in our modern day world that we take for granted--hot-water, refrigeration--but I found more things in Montana's woods that I had previously taken for granted than I could have ever imagined. A tree beside my tent was no longer simply a tree, but rather a brother whom I appreciated daily for shading my tent from sun, wind, snow, rain, sleet and hail. A stream was no longer simply a pretty sight and sound, but a reward at the end of the day. Yes, there are modern-day luxuries that we all take for granted, but more than that there is a natural world out there that many people never truly experience. It is a strange discovery to realize that you feel most at home in the woods, in the dirt among a community of living things. It is comforting to know that your home is all around you, always waiting and inviting you in. Working for the Montana Conservation Corps has been an interesting journey. I have learned more about myself than I ever expected or even originally wanted. Montana, thank you for sharing yourself; thank you for teaching me and opening my eyes to your wonders. I am forever indebted to you and will carry a piece of you with me always.

36) Written by Mason Giem, Campus Corps member at the University of Montana

As part of my term of service, I became involved with a group called the One Thousand New Gardens Project. I had the distinct pleasure of helping them develop their mission statement, and organize their best service day of the year. This Service day was called "Dig Day." We organized 35+ volunteers to show up at eight o'clock on a Sunday morning when it was snowing

and cold. We fed volunteers food and coffee, gave pep talks, and then spread out to dig up ten new gardens. I had the privilege of operating the sod cutter and went from house to house to make sure everything was happening properly. It was so much fun to promote sustainability, self-sufficiency, and community at the same time. Part of the way we helped promote community was through a website, which I created as part of my service. On the website, there is information on how to garden sustainably and organically as well as a link to a blog where our gardeners could share their gardening experiences with others. The website is growing and so is the idea. Next year, One Thousand New Gardens hopes to start 50 new gardens and by the end of five years, we hope to start 1,000 new gardens in Missoula's backyards. I learned so much about organizing through this group and would never have had the motivation without the great support of the Campus Corps staff. I feel like I am ready to organize anything now. I am proud to be a Campus Corps member and recommend it to anyone looking to give back to their community.

37) Written by Megan Jung, Campus Corps member at Montana State University-Billings:

One of my roles as a Campus Corps member at MSU-Billings was to serve as the Team Captain for this year's Relay for Life. As Team Captain, I arranged meetings, recruited team members, and helped raise money to reach our goal of \$5,000 to donate to the American Cancer Society to go toward cancer research. It was a very fun experience, and I really enjoyed meeting people from all areas of campus and working with them for a great cause. However, as the weeks stretched into months of meetings and fundraisers, I somehow lost sight of what all the work was for and soon began to function on autopilot. The impact of our work did not really hit me until the opening ceremony of Relay for Life. As I watched the 700+ survivors of cancer proudly taking their lap around the track, and as I reflected along with countless others by the luminaries honoring my loved ones who have courageously battled and won or lost their lives to this disease, I realized the enormous importance of our efforts. I realized that all the garage sales, raffle tickets and popcorn, the ordering of pizzas, getting t-shirt sizes, and the multitude of other minute details were a small but significant step toward one day having every person affected by cancer be a SURVIVOR. That night, I truly felt honored to play a role in bringing people together not only to meet a community need, but a human need.

38) Written by Christy Racine, Campus Corps member at Blackfeet Community College:

My experience as a Campus Corps member at BCC has been difficult for a mother of four children, but ultimately worthwhile. I really enjoyed serving at our community's Early Head Start program, where I served most of my hours. I enjoyed the freedom of developing activities for youth during vacation time. I also volunteered in basketball tournaments, wrestling and other sport activities for area youth. I enjoyed coming up with ideas for holiday activities in our community, such as the food drive, Thanksgiving baskets to elderly and single parents, Christmas parade which involved the whole community, Christmas toy drive, All Chiefs Day, Martin Luther King Day, Valentine's Day card-making for the people in the Blackfeet Nursing

Home, making cookies and candy for the elderly, and many other projects. A particularly memorable project was making Easter baskets for 175 children in our community. I'll never forget seeing the faces of the children and parents when we delivered them. That was a reward that I will never forget and this was one of the greatest experiences that I have had in serving with Campus Corps. It was really neat and I plan on doing another tour of duty. I thank the people involved for this opportunity.

39) Written by Cory Talbott, Campus Corps member at Montana State University:

Every once and a while, you stumble across the "ideal job." That happened to me this summer. I served with Campus Corps at the Gallatin Valley Food Bank with the summer lunch program. My "job" had everything: a sincerely positive work environment; duties where you could see immediately the positive effect; happy, grateful clients; and a supervisor who enthusiastically supported every idea, no matter how lofty or crazy it sounded. I worked as hard as I could, and loved every minute. Time passed so quickly during the day, and I couldn't wait for the next day of going back to "work." Every day, at lunchtime, I was met with 40+ smiling faces that were thrilled to see what I had to offer. How often can you say that? It was impossible not to get excited myself at seeing how much appreciation the kids and their parents had for the summer lunch program. Because of the fantastic support of the Food Bank director and the volunteer coordinator/program supervisor, I was able to challenge myself every day to make the program better without concern that an idea might fail. We changed up the menu to include local produce and new recipes. We played games and did educational activities with the kids. Every day I had a chance to make a difference with 40+ kids. I could make a difference if they had a balanced meal for the day and were able to spend at least part of it not hungry. I could teach the kids and keep them happily entertained for an hour so that the parents could relax. I could make the program fun, so that the kids wanted to participate. This is a "job" that I simply cannot quit. There is work to be done! There is work that I need to do, for the kids in my community. The kids are our future. There is no bigger impact than positively affecting them. My service term may be over, but "the work" is not. This experience has enriched my life in so many ways. "The work" needs me, and I need it.

40) Jennifer Terrell, Community Partners member

"I volunteered at Project Homeless Connect and it was such a rewarding experience. I was able to educate over 50 people on blood sugars, hematocrit, and blood pressure. I made almost 10 referrals to people to Riverstone Health regarding elevated blood sugars- in fact, one of the fasting BGs was well above 450. I also made a referral to a lady regarding her hematocrit. It was so fulfilling to help others that are in need. It was such an eye-opener to see how many people in Billings are homeless or near homeless. After this experience, I will definitely

volunteer to work with the homeless again, whereas before I was afraid of talking to homeless people.”

41) Nursing student, Communtiy Partners AmeriCorps members

“I was able to complete hours for AmeriCorps during nursing school at Bozeman’s Montana State University. I was able to spend a lot of time working one on one with multiple patients at places like Bozeman Deaconess Hospital, Evergreen Rest Home, Montana State Hospital and the Hope House. Not only was I able to give of my time in order to provide help to them, but I also learned so much. I was able to work on nursing skills that I was learning at this time. Although more importantly, I was really able to touch the lives and hearts of those I cared for and they affected my life and outlook on life as well. I believe I am a better person as a result of my experiences and I will definitely be a better nurse because of the willingness of my patients to let me care for them when they could have chosen to have someone else.

Many patients come to mind as I try to decide which one to tell you about but, I will tell you about the one that may have touched me most leaving a large impression on me. I was caring for a male patient at Bozeman Deaconess Hospital who was eighty-one years old. He had been admitted as a result of having fallen on the porch at his home leaving a fracture in his left hip. Due to his age, he had many other ailments that he had just been living with up until this point; such as kidney failure. His wife of the fifty some years had passed away about five and half years. His children all voiced their opinions that they saw a change in him after their mother’s death. Their father was ready to give up. Upon admittance, it was determined that the fracture was not operable and the patient was given pain medication. His body was extremely sensitive to opiates and even the small amount of morphine administered to him caused him to aspirate leaving his lungs extremely compromised. The patient began to visibly fail. He was difficult to rouse and his urine output went from being extremely low to nonexistent. I cared for him on Tuesday and Wednesday and he passed that Saturday morning.

I think what amazed me that most about this gentleman was the person that his family explained him to be. They had nothing but praise for him, stating he had always been there for them and always put others above his own needs. He maintained a close relationship with his family and all of them looked up to him with great respect and love. It was evident that he had instilled in his family a sense of togetherness, strength, and love. He was a stronghold for them and I believe he will continue to serve that role for them even in his death.

I was able to see one of his granddaughters the Monday after he passed and I was still impressed by her strength and love even in such a sad and difficult loss. It was really amazing to see such a wonderful, caring family all working together and supporting one another without any thoughts as to their own needs. It brought tears to my eyes while I cared for this patient and it brings tears to my eyes now as I remember what an amazing gentleman had been the start of this awesome family. They truly are an example to the rest of us. As far as nursing care in this type of situation goes, it taught me that often time nursing care involves, not only the care of the patient, but also the patient’s family and other loved ones. This experience taught me

both on a personal level and also a professional one. It is the kind of experience that makes being involved with AmeriCorps and also becoming a nurse very fulfilling. Thank you!"

42) Student Teacher, Community Partners AmeriCorps program

"During my AmeriCorps service experience I had the opportunity to chaperone eight students along with my cooperating teacher to the national FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana. This was one of the best learning experiences of my life and for the students that participated. I was so impressed with the leadership skills that were bestowed upon the students at this convention. The opportunity also helped me become closer with the students and learn what it is that helps them learn as well as see leadership opportunities in a positive experience.

I had a great time at the convention and it was a good reflection of my volunteering/student teaching experience."

43) Nursing Student, Community Partners AmeriCorps program

"I do not have just one great experience to share because each of my experiences to while volunteering for AmeriCorps has been enlightening and gratifying. I am a nursing student and have fulfilled most of my AmeriCorps hours by working with people who were hospitalized or people who had a loved one in the hospital. Each one of my experiences has brought me happiness, satisfaction, and personal growth. With every patient, or patient family member I developed my skills as a nurse even more. I have learned true compassion, the skill of observation, and the art of active listening. Every smile is a sign of appreciation from my patients, I knew that I was, at least, making that person's day a little better."

44) JMGF AmeriCorps member

While I was doing my volunteer work for the AmeriCorps program, I worked on a lot of the Anaconda Job Corps equipment; repairing cement mixers for brick layers, servicing the vehicles in Heavy Equipment Mechanics and did snow removal when it snowed. I would have to say that my biggest accomplishment was rebuilding the cement mixer for the brick layers. I replaced the engine, fabricated new mixing paddles from scratch and painted it. Also, while I working on my volunteer hours, I became senior full times in my trade and was appointed as the D-wing leader in my dorm.

What I really hope to do with the education award is to go to Wyotech in Laramie, Wyoming for custom fabrication and high performance power trains. The school costs a lot of money so the education award is perfect to get me started. Another possibility is to go to Pikes Peak College in Colorado for an advanced training program and get a part time job while I attend school.

45) JMGF AmeriCorps member

“While I have been in AmeriCorps, I have become a role model to others. I’ve even looked into further education. I’ve shown an ambition and determination that I never thought I was capable of. In time I am sure I will still be this way.”

46) JMGF AmeriCorps member

-“I have come along way over the last 4 months, in Business Ed I am maintaining a leadership role on the orientation team; I am in charge of tours and help others. Takin’ charge & helping new students in our trade, show them the ropes of how Business Ed runs and what is expected. I have been committed fully so I am headed in the right direction.”

47) Jesse Brinkerhoff, MM\$ Member

I am so grateful for the opportunity I have been given to teach Financial Literacy at

Willard High School. There is nothing I could have done to prepare for the journey I’ve been on for the last 6 months and I am looking forward to what is in store for the near future.

I was looking for a transition from college to career and found out about AmeriCorps.

This idea that we are a financially illiterate people really captured my interest. Shortly after my introduction to Montana Making Sense, I was told I may be working at the Alternative High School...and would that be something I’d like to do? The fit seemed so perfect, it was like “AmeriCorps” had plans for me and I knew it...

Willard has two semesters, containing three quarters each. Last semester I taught Entrepreneurship to 12 students 5 days a week. We covered many subjects, ranging anywhere from net worth to the stock market to how DO you open your own business. The students explored what it would take to research, develop, run, and manage their very own coffee cart business in the school. We created a survey, gathered our market data, and started looking at the benefits and risks involved of being self-employed. In the end, the students decided against the time commitment required to start the business, but learned it was possible in the process.

Another project that was successful last semester was investing \$10,000 fake dollars into the real stock market! We made it into a competition, checked up on our stocks once a week and the students took into consideration trends in spending and understood the basic concepts of trade.

This 2nd semester is now closing out it’s 1st quarter (better get my grades in) and I have a whole new set of students with a whole new agenda! Instead of one solid Entrepreneurship Course, we have called the class Financial Life Skills, and the semester is divided into three main topics: Money, Career, & Your Future... Initially being put in front of 12 high school kids every day was challenging way to learn about all this stuff...or was it? Looking back, I don’t see any other way to really get yourself involved, ask others to help do the work, or be as organized as you need to.

Teaching this current semester, I’ve realized that the students are showing up every day to hear what we have to say, and it doesn’t have to be amazing...they just have to see that it matters.

48) Shawn Cowan – AmeriCorps member and Flathead Valley Community College Radiological Technology Student

“I would like to share a short little story with you that will give you a little insight as to why I volunteer my time and why it is so worth it.

When I do my volunteer work, it is all about how I can serve people. Do they need anything to make them comfortable? Do they need a soft voice to explain anything? A gentle touch on the shoulder or a hand held for reassurance? Maybe a warm blanket around the shoulders to chase away the chills of a cold hallway and make them feel a little more secure. I do not do these little acts of kindness because I think I “have to,” I do them because I “want to.” Sometimes we get a “thank you,” a smile or a simple nod. Once in a while we are blessed far more than that. I did receive that blessing for one warm blanket put on a small set of cold shoulders and a few minutes of conversation with a sweet little grandmother.

As fate would have it, I was volunteering at the Shepard’s Hand free clinic one night and overheard one of the doctors talking about his mother. She had just returned home from a short hospital stay at KRMHC. He talked about how his mother was treated so well and how she loved the warm blankets. She would get a warm blanket every time she went somewhere in the hospital for a procedure and they always gave her another warm blanket for the trip back to her room. She told him about her exams and x-rays. She talked about how they would sit and visit with her until it was her turn. He was very thankful that there are still people that would take the extra few minutes to make his mothers hospital stay a little more bearable. I listened to the doctor tell his story and I began to put the pieces together. I realized his mother was the same sweet little grandmother I had warmed with a blanket and spent a few minutes with while she waited for her exam. I never realized how much effect such a small act of kindness can have on someone.

I never said a word to the doctor I was there and that I was one of the people that warmed her with a blanket and a kind word. There are some things that have their own rewards and bless us far more than words ever will. That is the reason I volunteer and will always volunteer my time.”

49) Leah Olson, AmeriCorps member and MSU-Great Falls Student

“This is my last semester in college, so for my great story I thought that I would describe what doing service via the Americorps program has taught me. There have been so many different people that I have been able to have a positive impact on while doing this work that it is hard to narrow it down to just any one story. There have been many times we can help others out and it doesn’t always have to be something big, even little things count. It is very easy to get caught up in the daily activities of life as a student and a working mom that you often forget the needs that other people in the community have.

I have volunteered for different public service programs such as community health fairs, helped raised money so children with asthma can go to camp in addition to taking care of patients in the hospital setting. Up until I started my terms with AmeriCorps I did not even realize how much volunteers contributed to these projects, I guess I just assumed that people showed up and helped out! I now realize just how many opportunities I have, and am also more aware of the responsibility I have as a good citizen to take advantage of these opportunities and make a better person of myself so that I in turn can give back to those less fortunate than me. Serving with AmeriCorps gave me valuable resources that I needed to help finish my education and also gave me the incentive that I needed to get up and do something for someone else.”

50) Education Student, Community Partners AmeriCorps member

“I served as an AmeriCorps member for three months at the Huntley Project High School in a rural area near Billings, Montana. The school serves families from four small communities with many different backgrounds: ranching, industrial, oil refinery, and retail. Many families in the area struggle to maintain a solid source of income, and many children lack solid support provided by a functional family. Many are special needs students, not necessarily due to a lack of intellectual abilities but as a result of adverse environmental factors.

One such student, Jasmine (name changed for anonymity), has had a history of failed math tests and poor grades. She was often able to perform simple computations quite rapidly, but often struggled in solving more complex problems. After consulting with my cooperating teacher, she suggested that I give Jasmine a little extra support via some tutoring. After spending some time looking over Jasmine’s grades and consulting with her resource from teacher, we decided to utilize a remedial math software program, Accelerated Math, to provide extra practice and assessment Jasmine’s skills.

Over time, Jasmine’s skills and concentration greatly improved. Her homework scores moved up several letter grades, and she grew much more confident about her abilities. Several times she performed some very complex analytical and problem-solving tasks, to my pleasant surprise. After my last week, I left feeling very grateful to have played a small part in this student’s achievements and confidence in math. “

51) JMGF AmeriCorps member, Anaconda, MT

I helped the Job Corps staff in Education most of my time in AmeriCorps. I also helped train students to take my place. It was a big sense of confidence when I did this because it was nice to teach others my skills and also use my skills to create a better, more friendly environment in Education.

I plan to use my Education Award at FVCC in Kalispell. I am enrolling for radiology in January 2010. Now that I plan on entering college I am very happy I completed my AmeriCorps scholarship. It will be helpful with school supplies and class fees!

52) JMGF AmeriCorps member, Sand Coulee, MT

I volunteered a lot at Head Start in the classrooms. One day, when I was helping out in the classroom, I got to help a young girl learn to tie her shoes. She was struggling to tie them herself, just sitting on the ground in the middle of the playground. I went over and asked her if she needed help. When she replied 'yes', I showed her how my parents showed me. She tried a few times and almost gave up, but I convinced her try one more time. She got her shoes tied! She was so happy! I couldn't stop smiling, I was so happy! I learned a lot about myself in this little act. I also realized what I wanted to do with my life. I am going to use this Award to go to college to become a pediatrician.

53) JMGF AmeriCorps member, Great Falls, MT

Completing my volunteer service has increased my self esteem as well as my self confidence. It makes me feel great to know that my service will be greatly appreciated, and I feel that I will be successful in the future. The overall experience of this program has encouraged me to pursue a career in the engineering/building industry. Mr. Maurer taught me the rights and wrongs of building a home and equipped me with the necessary knowledge needed to be successful. I will use the \$1,000 Education Award to further my education in college. I feel that this experience has given me excellent personal connections that I hopefully can use in the future.

54) JMGF AmeriCorps member, Eureka, MT

When I first found out about this program I was really excited because I was going to be able to help out other people while also helping pay for my college career. I am a type of person who loves helping others because I want to help them better their lives in every way possible. When I first started working with my mentee, I knew it was a great way to help her out because she was struggling in a lot of ways. The biggest accomplishment that I was proud of was helping my mentee better her life. When I first met her she needed a lot of help in every aspect of her life. I made a goal that I wanted to help her improve by the end of the year. I worked with her all year long and helped her become a better person and a better student. She worked on it a lot, but I also assisted her and gave her support along the way. I feel really good that I was able to help her better her life. I plan on using this Education Award to help pay for college.

55) JMGF AmeriCorps member, Florence, MT

I feel that the program has helped me with many accomplishments. One of them was when I was volunteering with the school nurse. I finally learned some things that I know will help me in school next year. I learned how to do blood pressure and blood sugar. Also, I learned all the

necessary immunizations for entry into school. I am really thankful for this opportunity and feel it has really helped me a lot.

56) JMGF AmeriCorps member, Great Falls, MT

This year I got the chance to work on a house that is built for low-income families' through NeighborWorks. Throughout the volunteer service, I learned many new skills that I can apply to my everyday life. This year a SkillsUSA competition was held in Havre, MT. A select group of participants on the High School house were able to attend this competition. Through the numerous skills I acquired through this program, I was able to take 3rd place in the carpentry event. It was a very rewarding experience that I owe to this program. I plan to spend my \$1,000 Education Award on attending Montana State University, in Bozeman.

57) Zach Thorup, MM\$ Member

Working with homeless clients at the Poverello Center brings out many things in my work experience. There are frustrations, elation, funny stories, successes, and shared teaching moments. Classes are often sparsely attended, but the clients who attend are highly motivated to learn, and often have a specific goal in mind when they ask me to help them with something. Classes at the Poverello Center have focused around improving basic conceptual understanding in budgeting, financial institutions, and credit reports.

Clients who attend the classes are residents of the on-site emergency shelter, and this living situation has a negative effect on their attitudes about learning. Because of this, I work to lead classes in a roundtable discussion format and make sure everyone has a chance to talk, even if just for a short time, especially if they feel motivated to participate. I have learned to make room in my classes for the possibility that a client might be mentally ill; it is often a part of clients' lives in one way or another, and I have had an easier time with teaching after learning to let some aspects of class bend and flex.

Teaching at the Salcido Drop-In Center down the block has shown me a different side to the clients. The center is a day time center that is unique in that it turns no one away from its doors, even if they are highly intoxicated. Often the clients are looking merely for a place to sleep after long cold nights out, wherever they might have found a place to sleep. The co-occurring substance abuse and homelessness presents a big challenge to education, and because of this, I have adjusted my sense of teaching priorities and worked on leading classes that involve resume building and job interview skills. This has provided an access point to clients who are interested in improving their prospects, and I have worked to develop conversations about ways they can improve their financial management skills. This has paid off with a few exceptionally motivated clients, and they have found employment after working with me on their resumes.

The broad scope of financial literacy sometimes feels disconnected from the people I'm trying to teach. But the people that are here need help, and I try to make information available as they need it. I've had to learn that not everyone I see will care enough to attend classes, but I find

redemption in working with clients who are motivated, and who are working to expand their personal **possibilities**.

58) MM\$ Member

The Poverello Center, Montana's largest emergency homeless shelter, includes the big blue house downtown (shown on pg. 1 in this issue), commonly known as "The Pov", as well as three satellite locations: Valor House, Joseph Residence, and the Salcido Drop-In Center. The Valor House is a home for Veterans. The Joseph Residence is a longer term housing site for families in transition. The Salcido Drop-In Center is a daytime site, aiming to be a safe place for clients to rest, access information, and make phone calls to family and case workers. The Salcido Center is unique in that it serves clients who are intoxicated, and operates under a "No Wrong Door" approach, which centers around meeting clients wherever they are, and working with them at the level they are at right then.

The Poverello Center is highly regarded by the people and the leaders in the Missoula community. There are many volunteers who support the work of the Poverello Center, as evidenced by the service projects reported here for Make a Difference Day and the Martin Luther King Day of Service.

Originally from California, Zach is working on a bachelor's degree in accounting, and hopes to continue his work in the non-profit sector. He is interested in sustainable business, and hopes to develop his skills to be able to contribute to sustainable development and transportation.

59) Human Development Student, Community Partners Program

"The HRDC is a nonprofit organization that provides social services to many low-income families, elderly and teens from around Bozeman. The Youth Development Program specifically helps teens to gain leadership skills, employment skills, social skills and literacy skills by placing them in work experiences, helping them obtain their GEDs, and by having them complete basic employment skills courses. The Youth Development Program also works closely with homeless teens in the area and is in the process of constructing a homeless youth drop-in center, and a transitional housing unit to better assist them.

While serving my term at the HRDC, I got the opportunity to work with many at-risk youth and homeless teens. One homeless girl's success story will always stand out to me. This girl was 17 years old, living in her car, attending high school and working part-time to pay for food, laundry other basic necessities. We helped her find an apartment, provided her with housing essentials, got her connected with other community resources such as the food bank, and are in the process now of finding her a new job. The smile on her face as she was moving to her own apartment made me realize that my service had really made the difference in someone's life."

60) From a Montana Tech Radiologic Technology Student

"I did my term of service in the Radiology Department at the Barrett Hospital and Health Care in Dillon, Montana. I had a great time in the service of many patients from the community and also working with the referring physicians. My story is more than what I did for a patient; it is about the community coming together in service.

It was a frosty Montana day late in the afternoon, when a patient was dropped off in the ER who was not breathing and had no heart beat! Right away at the ER personnel went right to work taking care of this person after which they called for the code blue team, of which radiology is a part, so we responded to x-ray the patient's chest. After a few minutes, a few of the nursing personnel became sick, or started to have difficulty breathing. When the third person became sick we knew this patient was the source of a chemical that was affecting the nurses. The administration made the call to close the ER down until we knew what we were dealing with.

After the life flight, fire department, search and rescue, police department, and health department were called a decision to do a full quarantine was made. Later on, a call was made to the National Guard because they have new machine that is capable of testing the air for chemicals without having to expose humans to the contaminated air. Until the National Guard was able to come, all of the personnel that had been exposed to the chemicals had to go through a full wash down by the fire department. The fire department and Search and Rescue team had set up outside for privacy, fully equipped with ice cold running water for all to shower in! Now, it was unlike a normal shower because it consisted of a fireman holding a garden hose over your head while you washed down. Before we could enter the tent however, we all had to leave all our clothing and belongings in the ER so they could be tested for the chemical. By the time everything had been set up, it was after dark on a frosty Montana night! Well, I was among the last to go through the ice shower, and when the ice water hit me I did not care where my clothes were or who was holding the hose. All I wanted was to be done and cleaned of the chemical.

The incident was an amazing display of all the volunteer departments from the community coming together to help out twenty or so people who were in need of help after saving the life of one individual who was exposed to a potentially life-threatening chemical. All of the volunteer departments came on their own time to help and serve and did so in a professional manner. The example of all the volunteers in the community showed me that after my term of service with AmeriCorps, I can continue to serve the community in other ways, and for that I will be forever grateful."

61) From a MSU-Bozeman Nursing Student

"My service time has been primarily focused on working with patients in a health care setting. I had the opportunity to help build a playground for the town of Clinton. Over the course of five days and empty field next to Clinton Elementary turned into a fantasy playground for the children through the generous support and hard work of community members. Everyone, including the children, had a job sanding, painting, building, or even taking the small children on a tour of the new playground during the construction.

The playground opened for business on Sunday and as I watched over a hundred children descend on the new structures it was incredible to hear all the children exclaim "I painted that!" or "I put the bark under the tire swing!" Because the project involved the community from the beginning a great sense of pride and ownership overcame the crowd. It gave this small town a wonderful sense of accomplishment and joy."

62) JMGF Member, Helena, MT (Archie Bray Foundation)

Being put in charge of the online sales gallery I had only been trained to work on it in one day, and had a one month deadline to get the site ready for posting live online. The work was tedious, and I had to figure out a whole system to make it flow faster. One flaw would set me back a whole 10-12 hours! That being said during my last month in school I was pretty much volunteering about 20-30+ hours a week.

Now I have a system all set up with easy to read notes for the next person so they can do the work in one week! You never know how hard gallery work is until you do it yourself!!! But I stuck through with what I committed to do and have much more respect for people in this field.

63) JMGF Member, Florence, MT

It was a truly rewarding experience which I would not trade for anything. It also helped me to be well on my way to the \$1000 Education Award. With this award, I will be buying my books for college, which will take financial burdens off myself and my family.

64) JMGF Member, Fairfield, MT

I am going to Helena's Vocational Tech College to become an R.N. I want to work with babies and work in the hospital. I will use \$1000 to help me accomplish school!

65) JMGF Member, Florence, MT

I had many great moments throughout my experience with the AmeriCorps Program. However, my very best day was volunteering for the Special Olympics. I went into the day thinking "score, this will be great hours for my scholarship." But I left with a completely different perception. I bonded with many of the athletes, and to be there helping them and to have the chance to witness them overcome their obstacles was an indescribable feeling. I would relive that day over again any time.

I plan to use my education award to attend the University of Montana, College of Technology. My intended major is Nursing, where I plan to continue my passion for working with and helping

people. I feel in many ways my AmeriCorps experience has helped prepare me for my future goals. Thank you!

66) JMGF Member, Butte, MT

I have helped with auditions at Same Difference Inclusive Theatre Company (SDITC). It was a great experience to see all the little kids with disabilities and how great they did. It was so fun to be see them get so excited and try so hard even though you could tell they were very nervous. I loved seeing their faces glow when they were performing. It was great to see even though they have challenges every day. They overcome them to do something fun and they really love to do.

67) JMGF Member, Fairfield, MT

During the time I was in AmeriCorps I learned many values. My most accomplished story is the time I spent working with some Special Olympic athletes. One girl was preparing for a balance-beam routine. I got to make up her routine, show it to her, and then help her practice it. We spent many hours over 3 months preparing. When the day finally came for her to perform we were both very excited! She gave me a little wink before she began and then performed flawlessly! The pride I had for both of us was something I will never forget!

This experience helped me confirm my decision on being an Occupational Therapist specializing in children. I will hold my award till next year, then buy books for my Sophomore year of college.

I will use the lessons I learned while in AmeriCorps for the rest of my life. I have come to realize that by helping one you help many. That just an hour of your time can last for days. Now that I know what reaching out can do and where it can lead you, I will volunteer more of my time. I will also try to get others involved so they too can hold special experiences as I did!

68) JMGF Member, Helena, MT

While volunteering at the Helena Food Share, I came to realize, often when people are seeking assistance and help, they aren't always at their best. One day while sifting through rotten vegetables in effort to salvage the edible ones, I was pulled aside by the director of volunteers and asked to help a "grumpy old man." Nervous and anxious to finely be assisting a client I went into the front area and rose to the occasion of helping a client. The director didn't lie or exaggerate by using grumpy as an adjective for this old man. This man was rude, angry and downright impatient with myself, fellow clients and the rest of the staff.

By aiding this client to help him choose the correct amounts of monthly groceries I learned something you just have to bit your tongue and realize not everyone is as pleasant or nice as

you would like them to be. This old man wasn't the nicest, but by being kind and patient. I was able to work on my own tolerance skills, bettering myself as a person.

69) JMGF Member, Helena, MT

During my time with AmeriCorps, I got involved in many different sexual assault advocacy and prevention trainings and meetings. I am now on the committee with Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. I also gained a ton of knowledge about domestic violence, and have given many presentations to students in my school and to adults. With my \$1000 award, I plan to attend school majoring in Pre-med to become a Physician's Assistant. This will be especially helpful to because this is something I've wanted to do since I was a little girl, so it will definitely help me achieve my goals. I would absolutely do this program again if I had the time.

70) Leia Loonsfoot, MM\$ Member

American Indian Business Leaders (AIBL) is a non-profit organization, housed at the University of Montana's Gallagher School of Business, with Chapters across the United States. We are the only American Indian non-profit organization solely dedicated to empowering K-12 and college aged students for future business careers. We intend that those future business leaders will use their education and experience to assist in empowering tribal economic environments.

Because AIBL believes that good business leaders and future entrepreneurs must have good money management skills, we provide a variety of tools to help them. For example, we have two methods in which we approach financial literacy education:

One is our Business Math Program, which is a 15-week course that provides a proven, culturally appropriate business math program to teach American Indian students about financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and college preparation.

We also have constructed guidelines and materials for Chapters to host their own AIBL Financial Wisdom workshops, which are all posted on the AIBL website.

As the AmeriCorps member at AIBL, my focus is on financial literacy for pre-college Native American students. I play a key role in AIBL's Financial Wisdom on-line curriculum. My tasks for AIBL are both (1) to support the development of our internet site so we provide financial training material on-line for AIBL chapters and (2) to ensure AIBL chapters host Financial Wisdom workshops, though they are many, many miles away. I also assist other MM\$ members in implementing financial literacy curricula.

We challenged all AIBL Chapters to help us organize AIBL Financial Wisdom Workshops in their communities. To host an AIBL Financial Wisdom Workshop you need to download the guidelines and request a Financial Wisdom Packet from our office. Everything needed to host the workshop is in the packet — you can visit www.aibl.org/financialwisdom to see our information.